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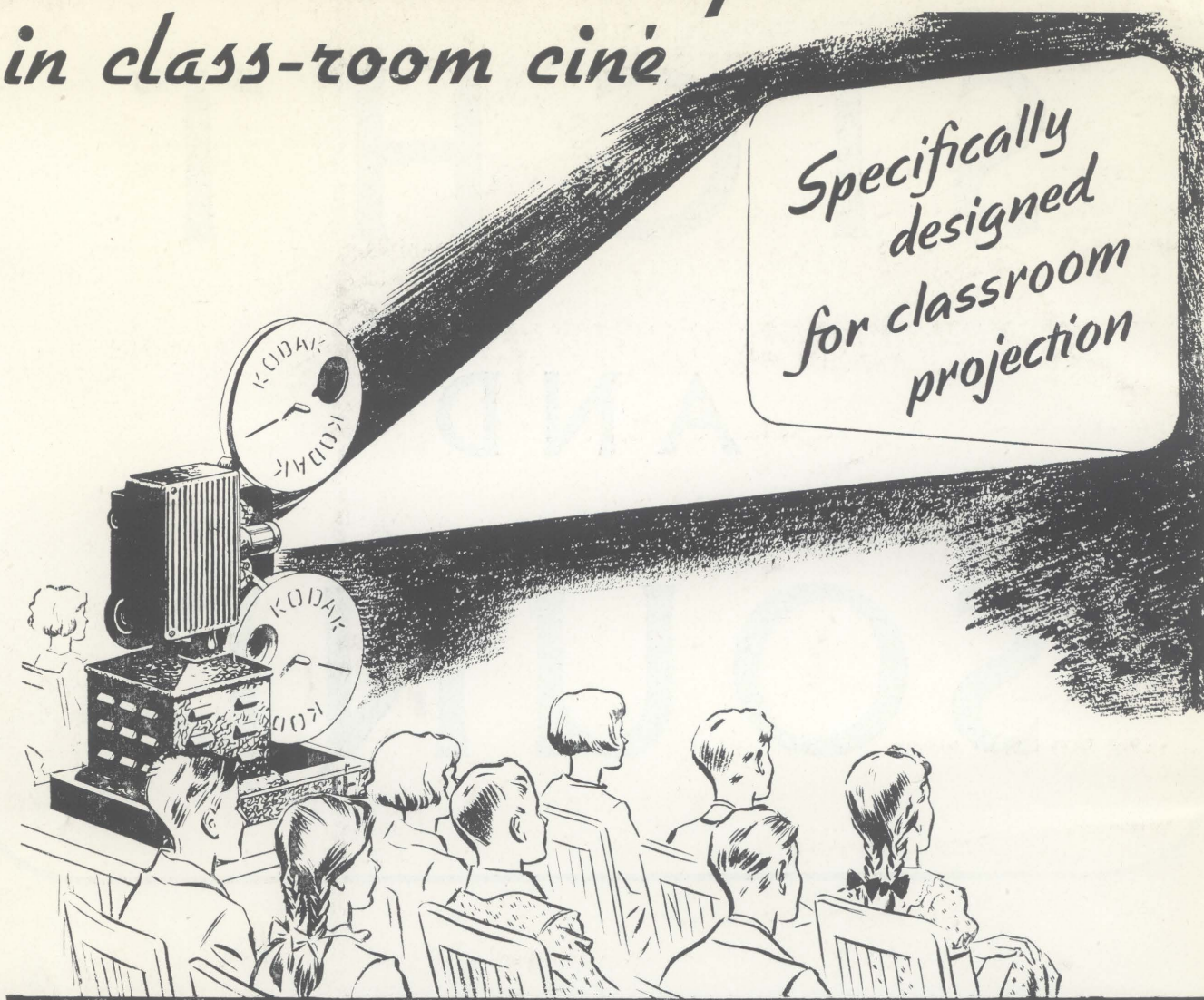
FILMS CONQUER NATIONS AS AMERICA SEES IT I REMEMBER
CABLE FROM HOLLYWOOD THE EXHIBITOR'S PART
WHY NOT A SCHOOL OF BRITISH FILM MAKING?

CONTRIBUTORS:

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CONTENTS

- NEWS REEL: Government Policy; Educational Film Policy; Films and Radio; War Film Collection, etc. 1
- FILMS CONQUER NATIONS. "Undoubtedly the film has become one of Hitler's most powerful and successful secret weapons" writes *Criticus* 4
- A LETTER FROM LISBON: A short account of Portuguese reactions to British film propaganda 5
- AS AMERICA SEES IT: An important article on what we should do by way of propaganda by film in the U.S.A., written by Richard de Rochemont, the Managing Editor of *The March of Time* 6
- WHAT IS THE FATE OF THE FILM STILL? A plea from Corporal Clark Neill for the prolongation of the still's life in art galleries, hospitals—or even billets and barrack rooms 7
- I REMEMBER. Bruce Woolfe writes some recollections of 21 years in the production of short films 8
- CABLE FROM HOLLYWOOD. Herman G. Weinberg tells us what is going on in the American Film Business 9
- THE EXHIBITOR'S PART. Mr. W. R. Fuller, General Secretary of the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association explains how the war has affected the theatres 10
- WHY NOT A SCHOOL OF BRITISH FILM MAKING? As a result of reviewing fifty-one films in four months of which only nine were English, film reviewer Evelyn Russell makes a suggestion 12
- NEW NATIONAL FILM LIBRARY POLICY: A note on the new policy adopted by the committee to make the treasures of the Loan Section more generally available 13
- WHAT ABOUT SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH? asks Mary Field in a letter to the Editor 13
- STAGE AND FILM DECOR: A review of Mr. Myerscough-Walker's book 13
- GETTING PROFESSIONAL RESULTS FROM A SUB-STANDARD EQUIPMENT by Mr. D. Bateman 14

TO READERS

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H.M. COMMISSIONERS of Customs and Excise have recently issued a statement defining the position of Substandard Cinematograph films in relation to Purchase Tax of which the following is an extract:

Films which will only be offered for hire by a recognised film library or other renter and will not be available on purchase, whether from that library or otherwise, are free from tax. This ruling supersedes previous decisions in regard to cinematograph films.

The Directors of G.B. Equipments Ltd., have decided that in view of the above ruling the surcharge on film hire charges introduced on the 16th of December, 1940 shall be withdrawn forthwith.

G.B. Equipments hope that the reduction in Film Hire costs made possible by this ruling, will enable the many Service users, both Civil and Military, of sound and silent films, to take full advantage of the GeBescope Library Service.

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NEWS REEL

Comments of the Quarter

by SIGHT AND SOUND

Contributors

To be or not to be

Every Government's policy towards the film world has been one of vacillation, nor with their many other pre-occupations have members of the present Cabinet been able to give a clear lead on the simple issue as to whether the British film industry should continue or not. The result is that many brilliant young technicians with many years of training behind them have been already swept into the Forces. There their talents are hid under the usual bushels of fatigues, drill and gunnery or other training. Though, as we write, it seems probable that steps will be taken to safeguard the remaining key men from being summoned to the Colours, intelligent observers anxious for the future of the industry are asking it: Is it too late? Have we sufficient people left to continue the output of news, documentary, educational, instructional and entertainment films throughout the war? If not can steps be taken to reclaim from their present duties the more important of the men who have already been called up? If they live up to their apparent intentions, it is good that the Powers-that-be have given this tardy if grudging recognition of the value of films since all those who have come into touch with the civil or military population know how important they are for every purpose. Those, too, who have seen the skill with which our enemies have built up entirely false impressions through the care they lavish on their own film propaganda, know how essential it is that we should have enough skilled men to enable increasingly effective counterblasts to be put out. Finally there is the post-war period to be considered. Is it too much to hope that those members of the Government who are concerned with the task of thinking ahead, will take into consideration the function of the film in the same manner as they think in terms of using the press and the wireless?

All this, however, turns on whether by the new scheme we can salvage the already partially wrecked British film industry so that it will not again have the painful hill to climb that it did in the twenty years after the last war.

Future School Film Policy

The final report of the British Film Institute's recent Educational Film Campaign has now been published and submitted to the Board of Education. It contains five technical and ten general recommendations. The Institute's Governors consider that all these will form very useful guidance after the war for those whose business it will be once again to develop and expand the use of optical aids in the class room.

One point brought out in the report, is that some Local Education Authorities have been badly advised and in consequence have wasted money in providing elaborate fire-proof projection boxes such as would be needed if 35 mm. projectors were being installed. In other cases projection boxes have been built which have no viewing port for the

opera or if one was put in, it is on the wrong side of the projection port. In fact the evidence shows that projection of films is seldom seriously considered by school architects and so the Board is recommended to look particularly closely at these points when approving plans for new schools.

A second point so obvious indeed that it is frequently overlooked, is the need for more training of teachers in the handling of projectors—and this is more important today than ever before. There is evidence that quite a number of projectors are out of commission owing to mishandling and now that it is hard to get spares and skilled mechanics they have had to be left unrepaired. In this connection there is a very strong recommendation in the Report that Training Colleges should include projection technique in their curriculum and that thereafter their knowledge should be kept up-to-date by refresher courses arranged by the Local Education Authorities. These courses should deal both with manipulation and also with the latest developments of teaching technique.

Regional Libraries

A third recommendation of the highest importance in the Report is that the Board of Education should consult Local Education Authorities with a view to the establishment of Regional Film Libraries: and that pending the formation of such, the Board should encourage Authorities to cover the cost of film hire to schools. This recommendation is supported by the clearest of evidence, that the loudest complaint of all teachers using films is always of inadequate supply. In this connection it is worth noting that the policy of the Ministry of Information and of the Army Education Corps in making local dumps of films has been wholly justified. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that these may later become the nuclei of the Regional Film Libraries, the establishment of which the Institute so ardently advocates.

The last of the chief recommendations of the Report advocates the appointment of a permanent full-time travelling teacher-organiser. His business would be to maintain personal contact with Directors of Education and teachers throughout the country, to give lecture-demonstrations and advice, and last but not least to encourage and assist in the formation of local Teachers' Film Groups. On the value of such Groups the Report has a lot to say, making it clear that where such bodies exist films are generally well-used and the teachers are enthusiastic, and *vice versa*.

It is pleasant to be able to report that thanks to the generosity of the Carnegie U.K. Trustees the Institute has now received a grant sufficient to allow them to appoint such a travelling-organiser for one year at any rate. It is the Institute's intention to appoint one of the old campaigners if his release can be secured and to get to work as soon as possible.

Back to Music

Hollywood thinks that the wheel of public taste has turned again and that its new preference will be for musicals. So musicals the public are going to have. Foundation for this is the belief that people are more anxious than ever to forget their troubles and the man in the street wants to go home from the movies humming a happy tune. We certainly have had from America a large number of serious films both with the social background like *Grapes of Wrath*, the historical background like *North West Mounted Police* or anti-Nazi films like *Escape*. Perhaps with the shadows of war looming darker over the whole world Hollywood's feelers of the public pulse are right and escape is what the public desires from all forms of entertainment.

The new trend was started by Twentieth Century with *Tin Pan Alley* and followed up with *Down Argentine Way*. The company is now at work on four or five others, two of which will star the same people as were in the above two. M.G.M. has four musicals on the tapis including film versions of the two popular musical comedies, *Lady be Good* and *The Chocolate Soldier*. R.K.O. has a couple in the making, Paramount three, Warners two, including a film version of *The Desert Song*, and Columbia no fewer than six, one of which will be a George Formby who has now been signed up with that company.

News of other productions is hard to come by. In *Almost an Angel* Charles Laughton is being directed by Henry Koster, who is also directing a new Deanna Durbin film. Rosalind Russell and Cary Grant are being directed by Howard Hawks in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. Marlene Dietrich and Basil Rathbone are also at work in films written for their own particular type of acting. Other news from Hollywood is given by our correspondent, Herman Weinberg, on another page.

And in Britain

Since our last issue there has been issued a number of really excellent British films such as Asquith's *Freedom Radio* and *Quiet Wedding*; Thorold Dickinson's *The Prime Minister*; Carol Reed's *Kipps*, and finally John Baxter's *Love on the Dole*; all of which goes to show what we can do if we try, and gives point to the previous paragraph on the need for the Government as a matter of policy to keep the British film industry alive. All of these should, and it is to be hoped will, act as ambassadors for Britain in the same ways as did *Mr. Chips*.

There are still some more, which should be equally good, to come from British studios. One of these is *Penn of Pennsylvania*, which is being directed by Lance Comfort, a newcomer whose first big job will be watched with interest all the more because the subject has as great an appeal to the other side of the Atlantic as here. The long awaited *49th Parallel* is just being finished off after the storms which have surrounded its production both here and in Canada. Asquith is at work on *Soldiers in Fleet Street* and then is going to join Gainsborough, a company with which he was associated eight years ago, when he made *Cottage to Let*. Other films which are in the making are *Ships with Wings*, a story of the Fleet Air Arm, and *The First of the Few*, a film in which the Spitfire plays an important part.

The shorts companies are all very busy working for the two big sponsors, the Ministry of Information and the British Council. The former manages to maintain the high standard it has set itself. The Council has completed the

first three documentary films to be made in colour. It is also making a group of teaching films including two or more each on Geography, Science and Biology.

Quis Custodiet . . . ?

All the Services have wholeheartedly adopted the film as an essential means of training. All three are busy turning out films on all kinds of practical as well as on more theoretical subjects. So far so good! But there is a fly in the ointment and a big one at that. Too many of the training staffs forget that the film is not a lesson in itself but only an admirable aid to the teacher for certain purposes, and cannot do his teaching for him.

A very common complaint is that too many films are shown at once with the result that the squad to whom they are shown go forth in a mental maze. It is rumoured that one unit had a solid four hours showing of films! Another trouble is that films are put on the screen in no regular order and so it is quite possible for the last of a series to be shown, followed by the first and the whole rounded off with another on a completely different topic. It would seem that just as there is room for special courses in the technique of film instruction for teachers so there is a crying need for similar courses for Service instructors.

If the film is not properly used it will have an unfavourable reaction at the end of the war when men come back into civil life again. Should the subject of teaching by film ever come up they will remember their own experiences and vote against it. Whereas if their personal experience has been a good one there is no doubt that it will ultimately help the proper development of the use of film for school and community purposes.

Films and Radio

News of an interesting experiment in tying up radio talks with film illustration has come from a public school in Scotland. The B.B.C. has lately been running a series of talks on the U.S.A. One master in the school concerned thought he would try the experiment of trying to harness the spoken word by means of a film or so. He managed to persuade the Local Education Authority to bear the cost of the hire of the films and the first which fitted the talk was a four-reeler on George Washington. With a certain amount of trepidation on the score of its length he took his courage in both hands and booked it. The results were excellent and the listening group was provided with ample material for discussion. It was voted that the experiment should continue, so films coming as near as possible to the subject of the broadcast talk were accordingly got hold of. So far as is known the experiment proved a success right up to the bitter end.

There is much to be said from every point of view for this alliance of film and radio. Some people profess to think that the two are mutually exclusive. They are nothing of the kind, as both the Director of the British Film Institute and the Secretary of the Central Committee for Group Listening are always trying to make clear.

Three Dimensional Films?

Reports from Russia claim that a Mr. S. Ivanov has solved the problem of giving apparent depth to the pictures on the screen. The process, says the *Manchester Guardian*, is very simple. Stereoscopic films can be taken by any camera with any lens by using a small mirror arrangement that makes

possible the filming of two images simultaneously. Then the stereoscopic film, each frame of which is divided into two (one for the left and one for the right eye) can be thrown on the screen by any projector which has been provided with two mirrors. The most important thing is the screen. Ivanov's is quite different to the usual one. It is like a gigantic harp made of 30,000 slender wires strung with a precision of one millimetre and behind the wire screen is an ordinary white screen. The images for the right and left eye are thrown consecutively on the white screen, passing on their way through the outer wire screen. Their rapid succession produces one image with a stereoscopic effect. If the claim can be substantiated the dream of cinema enthusiasts has come true. They will have colour, sound and depth.

The article concludes by saying that the apparatus is working in the Moskva Theatre where the wire screen contains over 93 miles of wire and weighs six tons.

War Film Collection

A RECENT DECISION of the Ministry of Information has been to present copies of all their films to the National Film Library for permanent preservation. Thirty-eight of these films have already been received and others are to follow. Thus the National Film Library will be able to build up a complete record of Britain's official propaganda film activities parallel to the film record of its military activities which is being kept by the War Office Film Library. Thanks to the generosity of the British Council the Library is now also receiving automatically each issue of another important film series, *British News*, a composite news reel prepared by the Council for overseas distribution and made up of excerpts from the issues of the principal news reel companies. This is at once an important record of British overseas propaganda and a useful selection of current news reels to reinforce the National Film Library's own selection of such material.

The following current feature films have also been added to the Library by the generosity of their distributors and producers in recent weeks:

The Adventures of Chico (A.B.P.C.), kept as an animal picture of unusual interest.

Jamaica Inn (A.B.P.C.), kept as an outstandingly successful Charles Laughton film.

Man of Conquest (British Lion), kept as an outstanding production.

Pastor Hall (British Lion), kept for its interest as a propaganda film.

Topper Takes a Trip (United Artists), kept as an interesting example of present-day trick cinematography.

They Drive by Night (Warner). The Emlyn Williams thriller preserved as being notable for the atmosphere of authenticity in its background.

Yes My Darling Daughter (Warner). Kept for the light it throws on our outlook, it having incurred censorship in several American states.

Dark Victory (Warner). Kept for the acting of Bette Davis.

Confessions of a Nazi Spy (Warner). To be preserved because it inaugurated a new trend in American political films.

Dodge City (Warner), which is to be kept as an outstanding film of its kind.

Among *miscellanea* which have been received by the Library may be mentioned a copy of the Lotte Reiniger silhouette film *The King's Breakfast*, presented by Mr. Thorold Dickinson, and a film of the wedding of the Princess Royal presented by Mr. Lesley.

The Library continues to add to its collection of primitives as occasion offers. Among those added during the last quarter were *The Pickpocket*, *Wedding in a Motor Car*, *The Thankful Child* and *The Cursed Necklace*, all of which give some idea of highly coloured melodrama.

Erratum

Mr. Alexander Wolkoff writes from Teddington:

I refer to the item of news in your last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND regarding Mr. Arthur Elton's appointment to the Ministry of Information.

I should like to point out that the Shell Film Unit has always been a part of the Asiatic Petroleum Company's Publicity Department which deals with Shell publicity overseas and is under my management. Mr. Arthur Elton, therefore, before he joined the Ministry of Information was under my direction as consultant producer to the Shell Film Unit.

Mr. Jack Beddington, on the other hand, directed the publicity of Shell-Mex and B.P. Limited in the United Kingdom as assistant general manager of this latter Company, and had no control of any sort over the Shell Film Unit.

Mr. Elton has, therefore, never been on Mr. Beddington's staff until he joined the M.O.I.

Obituary

We regret to announce the sudden death a few weeks ago of Sir Charles Cleland, first chairman of the Governing Body of the British Film Institute. Sir Charles as a young man was the stormy petrel of Glasgow municipal politics, but by the end of the last war he had found that his main interest was in education and he became chairman of the City's education committee. His alert mind soon saw the possibilities of the film for educational work and he was made a member of the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films where his wide knowledge and experience was of immense value. When the Institute was created it was natural that he should be associated with its work and because of his vivid and outstanding personality it was equally natural that he should be invited to take the chair. In that position he piloted the new body through its early troubles and marked out the broad lines of policy to be followed. Three years ago he resigned his position but still took a lively interest in the doings of the Institute and his sage counsel was much appreciated.

In addition to this national work, Sir Charles was the driving force which put Scotland so far ahead of England in the use of films in schools, a position that is still maintained.

It is hard to think that we shall no longer hear that broad chuckle after a particularly pawky remark, nor see him driving his point through a committee and enjoying every moment of the battle, yet beneath his shrewdest hits he was the kindest and most generous of men and never bore animosity.

FILMS CONQUER NATIONS

“Undoubtedly the film has become one of Hitler’s most powerful and successful secret weapons,” says CRITICUS, a pen name which hides a well-known Wardour Street personality

NEVER IN the history of mankind has such a powerful weapon as that of the film been so successfully employed to influence the opinions of democratic nations and prepare the way for their submission to dictatorship. Hitler and Mussolini on coming to power fully realised that film propaganda is the first and most vital weapon in political as well as military management which reaches every section of the people.

From 1933 onwards, every German movie contained cleverly camouflaged propaganda, so much so that news reel editors overseas were obliged to view the material sent from Germany two or three times until they discovered it. Hitler, through his Reichsfilmkammer which controlled the entire German film industry, flooded neutral countries with films causing cinema-goers to reflect as to the genuineness of their government, give thought to its “alleged” corruption and become potential Nazi sympathisers. The individual productions were very impressive to the eye and of high technical standards, as was for instance the *Olympic Games* film, directed by Leni Riefenstahl, who employed batteries of cameras, exposed over one million feet of film and spared no expense.

In England too the Nazis went to great trouble to infiltrate their ideas among the middle and upper classes. Through the medium of the German Travel Bureau in Regent’s Street they circulated 16 mm. sound films which were shown to private gatherings and in clubs all over the country by their own representative on their loaned sound projectors. Their agents pushed their feature films such as *Der Herrscher* with Emil Jannings which ran for a considerable time in London. The subsidiary companies of the German Tobis produced big films like *La Kermesse Heroique* in Paris, *Burgtheater* and *Episode* in Vienna, all of which were financed from Berlin and made with the Aryan Clause. In all Balkan capitals UFA owned at least one super cinema and the TOBIS combine partly through their Sound System and partly with studio credits controlled all independent productions which were dependent on the vast German market for their returns.

The downfall of France, the adherence of Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria to the Axis was largely due, I believe, to years of preparation with films which succeeded in undermining the general morale of those people. Even in Greece until the last few weeks Nazi and anti-British films were being screened in the odd 175 cinemas.

Realism, stark drama, often ruthless and frightening in its presentation, with long shots of impressive military gatherings which seem to stretch beyond the horizon, are the main features of Nazi film methods. Their message

is to the effect that those who oppose Hitler are ruthlessly squashed and nobody can successfully challenge his advancing armies.

Elsewhere as in Latin America the Nazis have built a vast organisation. As the *Motion Picture Herald* only recently reported, the Agfa and Siemens Schuckert supply house show remarkable willingness to extend extremely liberal credits to studios. The bankruptcy proceedings of certain Argentine film companies have revealed that Agfa has been the biggest creditor with claims of over 30 per cent of the capital of each company. At creditors’ meetings the representatives of Agfa use their overwhelming claims to take control from other creditors. Thus the Argentine Sonol Films is supplied by Agfa with credits and cash advances by the Banco Germanico whereby the officers of those companies frequently appear prominently in the news reels, issued by the Sono Films. Their product and films, coming directly from Germany, are distributed by the Organisation Cinematografica Argentina (OCA) which will release complete programmes of German pictures produced by Terra, Ufa and Tobis.

Where an anti-Nazi film is shown, German and Italian agents organise disturbances during performances, threaten the life of the manager and force him to withdraw the picture from his theatre. Recently this has been the case with the British film *Pastor Hall*, and a number of other productions, released in Mexico City.

In all these neutral countries the exhibitors are continuously being supplied with German pictures at cut rate prices and shorts commentated in the local language are given away free of charge.

It is obvious that commercially all these films are a dead loss to the Axis producers, but the money has been well invested for propaganda purposes. Undoubtedly the film has become one of Hitler’s most powerful and successful “secret weapons” in creating the one simple idea that he and his armies are irresistible.

What of Britain?

No effort has been made, it seems, for years past to push the British point of view in the Balkans or in Latin America. Occasional super productions from England have reached those countries and one or other enterprising distributor has occasionally dispatched a good short though always at a loss to himself. He could not be expected to sell his one or two reeler for the price of the lavender print to the foreign buyer who usually expected them to be given away as was the case with Nazi shorts. Was therefore the British producer to blame if he disregarded those markets?

Since the outbreak of hostilities only a slight improvement has taken place, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Greece and Latin America are being supplied through official channels with films of little propaganda value as against those of the Axis. Contracts for British news reels on the American Continent, as well as in the Far East, are being cancelled since the same shots are continued in American reels which reach them much earlier. And here again the British news reel companies are not at fault. Is it essential that current news reels from the various Balkans and Middle East War Fronts take weeks to reach this country for lack of transport facilities? The Nazis fly their latest films by air from the front line to their Berlin labs., release the edited reels within a short period all over Europe and dispatch copies on their Syndicato Condor Transatlantic Air plane Service to Latin America where their agents immediately distribute them to exhibitors. Why can't the necessary air service facilities be granted to British news reel companies with whom speed counts?

Wake Up

British film propagandists must wake up to the fact that it is not sufficient to turn out mediocre films which they think are of interest to foreigners, but must adjust their outlook to the mode of life those neutrals lead. Continental temperaments are excitable, action and display of power only impress audiences over there whereas the unemotional approach of all English shorts is incomprehensible and boring to them.

The majority of English short producers whose work is otherwise often very commendable, have perhaps penetrated Europe as far as Switzerland, or maybe even Austria on their peace time summer holidays. Though none of them have an intimate knowledge of the Balkan countries nor do they speak the language. They are quite ignorant moreover of the mentality of the population who are often offended by things of which an Englishman is unaware, and as a result of which their films fail to achieve the desired propaganda.

Besides it is impossible to combat very efficient Axis film propaganda throughout the world with half-hearted methods, especially when Goebbels spends over £30,000,000 per annum on this item for Overseas consumption alone.

An efficient organisation is necessary, composed of people who have practical experience of foreign marketing conditions and are not hampered in any way by official red tape.

Provided suitable pictures are produced at least half of the 5,000 cinemas in Latin America and the majority of houses in European neutral countries could be induced in due course to show British films regularly, whereas at present no English distributor can even guarantee one screening in any capital in South America. The present distribution of propaganda films through official channels, i.e. Embassies and Consulates is insufficient, as it never reaches those classes of the population whose opinion eventually does count, nor can a Commercial Attaché be expected to be a film distribution expert.

With the efficient blockade of the British Navy, the Nazis are slowly running short of films in Latin America and are obliged to purchase American product to fulfil their commitments towards exhibitors. Now is the time to grasp this golden opportunity.

A LETTER FROM LISBON

THE ENTERTAINMENT world in Lisbon is of necessity a restricted one, for in spite of its glitter and superficial air of well-being, Lisbon is a poor city. The standard of living of its residents is low. Business men cannot afford to run luxurious entertainment for people who cannot afford to pay for it, and the refugee influx has done little to help them, since the wealthy spend their money at fashionable Estoril which flaunts its palms, its villas and its casino a few miles along the coast.

Most of its cinemas are adapted old theatres, that is all, except the Eden, a shining palace with more draughts and more waste space to the square foot than most buildings I know.

Films come late—or not at all, and the choice is usually a poor one. A first class film, however, usually draws good houses and has a long run. Quite the most popular to be shown in the last few months is *The Women* which ran for several weeks, drawing large and enthusiastic houses. Pinocchio also was so successful in its original version that it was shown again at Christmas time in Portuguese, and *A Yank at Oxford* is drawing delighted houses every night at the moment.

Pro-British propaganda has become such a feature in Lisbon cinemas that the authorities have had to take steps to stop people from demonstrating—though the steps are not always adequate, and in spite of notices asking them not to applaud there are bursts of cheering every time Churchill's face appears on the screen. Naturally this does not please the German and Italian legations here, and ineffective protests have been made. A week or two ago, after the news reel, one cinema attempted to show a short German film of variety acts. Scarcely had the first speaker appeared however, when the whole house—an almost entirely Portuguese one—rose to its feet booing and hissing, and the picture had to be withdrawn hastily. On another occasion—just when the British troops were approaching Bardia—one cinema had the genial idea of showing the news reel taken at the time when the Italians were entering Bardia last year. Such a yell of laughter went up from the audience, however, that that too had to be withdrawn.

Of the two big British propaganda films shown *The Lion has Wings* was far more successful, and no doubt suitable to the Portuguese temperament, than *Convoy*, which was held up for months by the censors who insisted on having an entire translation of the script before attempting to cut it. It was shown in Lisbon much cut, many good things being suppressed, including Lord Haw-Haw at the end. The film was shown rather less cut in other towns in Portugal, I understand, and in one small town some sixty miles away a local English business man was asked the night before the showing if he could lend the local cinema proprietor a Union Jack. When he arrived at the cinema for the first night to which he was invited, he found that he had been given the central box which was draped with the flag, and everyone rose and cheered as he entered! Of the shorter films *London Can Take It* was by far the most successful and hundreds of people went to the Eden Cinema to see that alone, leaving before the rest of the programme was put on. The night I went I noticed that people watched it in deepest silence, but when it ended there was a wild burst of applause.

AS AMERICA SEES IT

By RICHARD DE ROCHEMONT, Managing Editor of the *March of Time*

BRITAIN HAS secured an eminently favourable position in film propaganda in the United States during the last few months, but to one who has observed the process, mostly in New York, there is no evidence that the British Ministry of Information has any reason to congratulate itself.

With one lone exception, that of the Crown Film Unit short commented by Quentin Reynolds and sold here as *London Can Take It*, no British-made message-film has had any lasting impact on the American public. *Christmas Under Fire*, the second Reynolds effort, was well received for the kind of film it was, but definitely an anti-climax.

The favourable position of British propaganda here is attributable to the fact that America, psychologically, is in the war, and audience-attitudes are strongly bent towards Britain. Then, too, the British blockade of the Continent, though imperfect, has managed to reduce the supply of Axis propaganda films to a mere trickle. But in spite of the fact that audiences do not want to see German films, and in spite of their scarcity, those which have come through have been remembered. *Feldzug in Polen* and the later *Blitzkrieg im Westen* were most effective as released by the Germans through their specialised cinemas in the German quarters of several of our large cities.

Both these German compilations were later taken over by American producers and made into effective propaganda for the Allied cause, by re-editing and re-writing the commentary, and it can be presumed that they achieved the desired anti-Nazi effect. Some Americans were nevertheless ready to assert that the pictures themselves were more powerful than any commentary, pro or con, which could be put with them.

Since Britain has in a great degree won its own battle for audience-consciousness by the daily newspaper and radio reports of how bravely its people are resisting Hitler in their homes and at their work, the task of the films themselves is not to convert but to reassure and explain. The American public is already solid on the justice of the essential British case; to-day it needs to be made constantly aware of the fact that in accepting Britain as a symbol of right it has made no mistake.

In the United States the issue is not "Shall we help the British?" but "*How much* and *how* must we help the British?" On the one hand, the external evidence seems to be that Britain needs everything we can give her, including men, but the statements of your statesmen and our own, to the effect that no men are or will be needed, seems strangely unconvincing. We know that no American soldiers are required to defend the British Isles. But can the reconquest of the Continent be achieved without those American divisions which in that other war (believe it or not) made such a tremendous final difference? For to most of us, simple survival of Great Britain is not the answer. We want to have victory or nothing.

British films, news reel or other, have laid far too much emphasis on the slap-happy character of British resistance.

It would seem that Britain's little man had taken as his model the old boxer Phil Scott, known in these parts as "the swooning swan of Soho". Phil, as brave an exponent of the manly art as any, spent more time on the canvas than anyone since Horizontal Joe Beckett. He was frequently down, and almost never out. He was game as they made them, but never managed to polish off any of his rivals to the American taste. He has in later life become a model of propriety and an esteemed publican of London's suburbs, we hear, but nobody in the U.S.A. ever glows with the memory of how "Phalling Phil" could take it.

For we Americans are an excessively violent people, and when we get confused and irritated we are likely to sock somebody in the jaw. We don't much care who it is. The nearest person, mostly. This is a definite *katharsis* for us, and we feel better after it. And we like to see others acting in the way that we consider normal. The films which have come from England have given Americans little emotional support in this respect. We have seen all types and conditions of men and men smiling amid inconceivable ruins. We have seen them do "thumbs up". We have heard them sing. And we feel, more and more, that if we were in the same boat we would not feel that way about it at all. And since we are beginning to climb into the boat with you, we wish you would act a little more the way we would.

Americans, after as much war as there has been, are somewhat suspicious that "business as usual" underlies the British way of war even now. The Germans, in their films, have carefully kept away from us any indication that life is pursuing its even tenor in Germany, though we suspect that since Germany has been living on a war footing for many more years than Britain there is relatively little external change. The German propaganda films have definitely kept up the illusion of a continuous forward march, created the image of something rolling which will be difficult to stop. British films have given the all-over impression of the Empire as an immovable object, and however sound and true this may be, it just isn't good drama or good cinema.

Therefore, America needs now films from Britain which will show the nation on the offensive, both on the war fronts and the home front. Certainly the British action in Libya has demonstrated what forces can be unleashed, what initiatives taken. On your home front films can be made showing how you vanquish inertia and indifference, and how you drive fear away. Or were the British simply born brave and stolid and grinning, with their thumbs up? Didn't they have to learn to keep themselves in hand when the attacks begin? Perhaps the British Ministry of Information has seen to it that films of this sort have been made, but we haven't seen them here. Such films full of progress and action would be infinitely convincing to us that Britain was ready, once the war was won, to do more than merely restore the *status quo ante*.

First you must win the war, we agree. We want you to win it. We want to help. But if we are to judge by the films you send us, we feel entitled to say "Wipe that silly grin off your face and get in there and punch!" As a matter of fact, we know that you are in there punching, but it isn't through your films that we learn it, except in an occasional glimpse of a set, stern face in the third row from the lens. If your ordinary people are too shy and embarrassed in front of the camera, you may have to use actors. But if the idea should permeate all your directors and cameramen and documentarians that the period for slap-happiness for export has gone by, I think they would soon begin to turn out the real stuff for us in America, and for you too.

So far, the most effective British propaganda has come from the American cutting-rooms and studios. This is easier for us because we can talk about England in that curious way we like to think about her. We can say the things which your own reserve forbids you to say. We can be as corny as we please about it, corny in the good old American way which has made Hollywood the capital of the mass emotions of the world. But to keep on doing this we must have some support from you. Otherwise we will feel that we are speaking out of turn, that we are more royalist than the king. Hollywood and New York are full of potent producers, writers and directors who ask nothing more than to help if they are encouraged. Your Ministry of Information should have a permanent liaison man here, preferably a cinema journalist from one of your trade papers, one who knows films both American and British, who knows many of the strange, influential people in our film business, and who has no personal Hollywood career to further and no personal axe to grind. He should have a charming wife, not too British, and a large expense account.

His rôle would be to get to know what plans each studio has in mind, to get a look at stories well in advance, to suggest angles which would help advance the British point of view, and above all to be discreet and helpful. His advice should carry weight not only with the local British diplomatic and consular people, but also with the Ministries. The right man, in such a job, would secure for Britain a good feeling and public understanding through the medium of the cinema such as no other British propagandist could ever achieve.

In Hollywood, the films will be made anyway, perhaps five hundred next year. No subsidies are needed. A huge public is waiting for these films. If two hundred of them carry even a minute message of confidence, clarification, praise in a British reference, a major work of public relations has been done.

For, from now on, on the American screen, Britain is not competing with Germany, but with the American national defence effort. I don't know how many films will be made here in the next year with national defence as their theme, but several dozen are announced already. It is in these films, as well as in ordinary dramas, musicals, and action pictures, that little bundles for Britain can be inserted. Tactfully done, they will establish an identity of purpose between England and America which will make your task easier, and confound our isolationists.

In the meantime, your news reel material needs looking after. Too much of it appears here as pointless, thoughtless, stand-by stuff, devoid of meaning and frequently lacking in interest. The fact that the news reel editors publish it at all is high testimony to their own desire and their audiences' for news of Britain's struggle. Whether this

uniform mediocrity is due to lack of productive imagination or to lack of facilities, one cannot tell from here. Occasionally something great comes through, but in cases like the fire in the City, it is Jerry who stage-managed the production, and the cameramen had their work laid out for them by Herr Direktor Goering. This is not good enough. England, according to good and reliable friends of mine, is putting on the greatest show on earth, full of thrills and drama and emotion, better than anything Hollywood will ever imagine. We feel we should be getting more of this in our cinema, where we Americans go for our emotional purges.

The winter months are over, and the darkness which makes news reel work in England a purgatory for five months of the year will soon be gone. Will we have better glimpses of your battle from now on? Will we find on our screens the vision of a powerful, fighting, violent Britain? Something we can stand up and cheer about?

What is the Fate of the Film Still? asks Corporal Clark Neill

THE ART of the still-photographer, those beautiful bromides that draw you magically into the cinema foyer appear to have an unnecessarily short life. It seems exceedingly wasteful that these often perfect examples of photographic technique should be forgotten just as soon as they have successfully advertised their mobile parent.

Like the men who make the trailers the still-photographers are a group of workers who are supremely competent at their specific job.

Technically the average still which they achieve is almost flawless; lighting and exposure just right: the subject chosen with an eye to inducing mental mouth-watering that is little short of masterly.

But I think there is more to the still than that—many of them are minor works of art. Can one forget the beautiful mood-lit shots of Charles Laughton as Rembrandt issued by London Films? And the same studio's exquisite portraits of Marlene Dietrich by Tunbridge. The stills from *Nell Gwynn* and *Peg of Old Drury* would be an object lesson in detail for any history class and the character studies of Katherine Hepburn from *Spitfire* could successfully adorn the walls of any home.

But the film producing companies seem to feel that there's nothing so cold as yesterday's stills. They fade away quicker than any old soldier. Just what happens to them is a mystery. The selection issued to the press is usually filed for future use. The Museum of Modern Art in New York collects them. A few isolated private individuals also collect them as a hobby—Paul Rotha published a book entirely made up of stills.

But only a microscopic proportion of the output can come to useful ends like these. What happens to the thousands that are produced annually?

They could be used with advantage to brighten our so dreary art galleries. Or if that is aiming too high, then the wards of our hospitals. Hung on the walls, or bound album fashion they would pass many entertaining hours in a patient's enforced stay. Or more topically, with the aid of a few stills the soldier could cheer and humanise his rather monastic billet or barrack room.

I REMEMBER . . . by Bruce Woolfe

FEW industries have seen more changes in the last 25 years than the production of films. In those days film studios were fewer and far less complicated than they are today. All films were sold outright at a fixed price, i.e., 4d. per foot. Those that were good sold large numbers of prints, those that were bad sold few. Consequently audiences were only shown the best of the world's productions and did not have to put up with the inferior material which is often foisted on to them today.

It was because short films were sold on their merits on equal terms with long films that I decided to concentrate on the former. I was also in favour of this type of film because I felt it was a more serious type of work, and this appealed to me. I therefore set about gathering round me those people who felt the same about it as I did myself. Unfortunately conditions in the short film industry have gradually grown worse from those days onwards but there has been, as far as we are concerned, one redeeming feature which has enabled us to carry on in spite of the changing conditions; this has been the series of films formerly known as *Secrets of Nature* and now as *Secrets of Life*. For twenty-one years these have gone on steadily whether as silent films, talkies or in colour. They have been exploited in practically every country in the world except Germany.

One of the earliest was the *Life of the Mayfly*, which was mainly photographed in a glorified shed which we used in those days as a studio. I had laid in a supply of the larvæ which we had used to show the growth and transformation into pupæ. I estimated that with the quantity I had I should be certain to secure two or three of them emerging as flies from the pupal case. I remember arriving one morning and finding that at least half a dozen of them had emerged during the night and had disappeared. This alarmed me; I wondered if being kept in artificial conditions made them nocturnal. We at once rushed to set up our camera to photograph the next one that emerged but before we could get the camera set up three more had risen to the surface, emerged from the water and were resting on a piece of foliage unfolding their wings. It amazed me to see the rapidity with which this operation was performed. The pupa would rise rather slowly to the surface and almost immediately the case would split and in five seconds the fly was free. Unfortunately for the mayfly the succeeding operation is not so speedy as it cannot fly away until the wings have unfolded and hardened. It is this period which is bad for the fly but good for trout—and for the angler.

After the second batch had emerged our camera was ready, but for two days and nights we were unlucky and did not record a single emergence. Either it took place in the wrong part of the tank—the field is very limited for a creature of this size—or it took place when we were not looking. Eventually we had to sit with eyes glued to the tank waiting for the slightest indication that the event was to take place. At last when only two pupæ were left we got our picture. We had shepherded the last couple into the centre of the tank so that our camera could be trained on the exact spot where they would emerge and one of them obligingly came up right in the centre of the picture and performed like a good artiste.

We were very keen on cricket at our studio at Boreham Wood and used to practise for some weeks before the season opened. One Sunday morning we were having some batting practice and one of the players got in a really lovely hit to leg. The ball sailed through the air, took one of our windows in its flight and finished up in the studio. Next morning we found a pair of robins had found their way in through the hole made by the ball and were busily engaged in laying the foundations of a new home. This was too good an opportunity to be missed, so we rigged up a camera and lights and recorded everything, from the building of the nest to the young birds eventually leaving home through the hole in the window. We got a good deal of by-play and some dramatic suspense when the studio cat discovered what was going on and tried to negotiate the hole but was unable to do so. I was rather surprised at the time that the old birds did not seem to mind the lights, but have since found out that all wild creatures like the rather powerful lights we employ, birds frequently start to sing when we turn them on, and once at the Zoo the orang-outang came and stood right in the beam rubbing his tummy very appreciatively. I believe they think it must be some sort of sunshine. With some of the smaller creatures lights are more of a trouble. We made a film once of the blow-fly with *Dr. Fraenkel*. A portion of it had to be "shot" with lights which very often dried the subject up before it could be induced to "perform". The worthy doctor came down to the studio with all his material beautifully prepared thinking it would be a quick job to photograph it. I am afraid he now realises that making films of natural history subjects is more a matter of patience than he expected.

I remember once Percy Smith was making a film on moulds; I also remember some of the remarks passed by Mrs. Smith in connection therewith as she found old pieces of cheese and over-ripe bananas lying around in the home. Strict instructions had been given by the head of the house that these things were not to be touched as they grew their "fur coats". Eventually the film was finished but not the subject matter. Blue moulds appeared on the drawing room walls, other sorts of moulds in other rooms, and as fast as they were cleaned away they broke out in another place. You can imagine the good lady's feelings on the matter. He must be a trying man to live with, this Smith. The bathroom is full of jars with all sorts of cultures going on inside. While he was filming the embryology of the trout the bathroom was immobilised for three months. Electric bells suddenly ring in the bedroom in the middle of the night, caused by a gadget he has invented which is attached to the machine that records the growth of plants. If for any reason the machine ceases to function, and it is imperative that it goes on continuously, it cuts out a circuit and a bell rings in the bedroom.

Smith once made a film on dandelions which was called *The Tough 'Un*, and was designed to show how difficult it is to eradicate this weed once it has gained a hold. To make the film he had to instal various plants in his garden in order to film the complete life history. In due course the film was finished but the dandelions were not. They continue to rear their yellow heads in all parts of the garden. If he desires

to raise a clump of lupins or drosera for the purpose of a film, it is almost certain that a dandelion will crop up in the middle of them.

One of the most important parts of our work is now the diagrammatic film. We consider this is the most satisfactory method of teaching history by means of the camera. It all arose out of a film made some years ago by Mary Field called *The Expansion of Germany*. It was purely experimental but it showed very definitely the possibilities of this technique in covering subjects that by any other means would entail enormous expense. It was generally agreed that this film opened up a new field, but it was exceedingly difficult to explore that field any further owing to the scanty recognition offered to any sort of instructional film by the powers that be. We made two other less pretentious subjects but they carried us very little further owing to the

fact that they were less pretentious. Finally, however, we managed to secure the interest of the British Council, who commissioned us to make a film on the History of the Atlantic Ocean, and the University of Manchester who sponsored a film on Unemployment and Money. These two subjects proved the value of the new technique which has now been taken up by the War Office and is used extensively for the teaching of gunnery, height-finding, etc. We feel therefore that here is a definite contribution to the cause of the instructional film which, under the stress of war, has proved its ability to instruct quickly and efficiently.

Films made by us are finding their way to all parts of the world and they are blazing a trail which we believe will develop into a broad highway once peace is established and men are able to turn from thoughts of destruction to the advancement of knowledge.

Cable from HOLLYWOOD

Herman G. Weinberg tells What's On

MOST OF THE films of any interest here at this moment have to do in one way or another with the war, and there is no question about public sentiment—it is overwhelmingly pro-British.

The flow of anti-Nazi films continues unabated. We have already had *The Mortal Storm*, from Phyllis Bottome's novel, *Four Sons*, one of the earliest of the series; *The Man I Married* (originally called "I Married a Nazi"); *Escape*, from the novel by Edith Vance; and, of course, the famous *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, based on files in the U.S. Department of Justice. This season will see the release of *So Ends Our Night*, based on Eric Maria Remarque's novel, *Flotsam*, and we have already had *Arise My Love*, perhaps a curious title for an anti-Nazi film, as is, no doubt, the new title for the Remarque story; *mais, que voulez-vous, mes enfants, c'est Hollywood!*

London has seen *The Great Dictator* by this time so I needn't tell you how wonderful it is. Chaplin remains Chaplin in it and that's the very best way it could have been. Attempts to suppress this film in Latin and South America have been numerous, instigated, of course, by local Nazi consuls, but in most instances the picture was shown over the protests and in Mexico City, where it is still running, a constant police guard is stationed before the theatre where it is showing to ensure that the Mexican citizens can see it unmolested by hoodlums and *agents provocateurs* of the Nazi and Italian consuls. In South America it is running everywhere, despite attempts to sabotage it and in no instance has an attempt to ban the film long remained successful. The citizenry raised such a hue and cry that the municipal authorities were forced to rescind the initial bans, where they occurred "in the interest of maintaining peace with friendly powers". *Vox populi, Vox Deo!*

M.G.M.'s *Flight Command* inaugurated a series of aviation films stressing home defence, and Paramount's forthcoming *I Wanted Wings* promises to be a rather spectacular affair dealing with the training of pilots. Meanwhile,

Warners is planning a film on underground anti-Nazi activity in Germany and Alexander Korda will produce a Ben Hecht story dealing with the Nazi invasion of Paris, which promises to be a bitter and sardonic picture.

Carol Reed's *Night Train* continues to be the most successful British film of the season. It received a most unusual and favourable attention in the press and has been playing to capacity audiences for several months. Despite the fact that it owes so much to Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*, it appears to have captured the popular fancy and the anti-Nazi temper of the moment. Quentin Reynolds' two short films, *London Can Take It* and *Christmas in London*, were played everywhere to jubilant acclaim, the former, with its taut understatement and almost lyric quality having created a kind of minor sensation here. *Pastor Hall*, which had a foreword by Mrs. Roosevelt endorsing the film, had a kind of *succès d'estime*, while *Blackout* and *Convoy* were much more than that. Even George Formby, who cannot be said to be American in temperament by any stretch of the imagination, succeeded rather well with the press and public in his satirical anti-Nazi comedy, *Let George Do It*. An American film glorifying the rôle played by the English "Spitfire" planes in the defence of Britain is to be produced this season.

Paramount's compilation of events that led to the outbreak of the current world crisis, *The World Aflame*, gleaned from thousands of feet of news reels, was an intelligent job of editing and deserves its London success. The first March of Time feature, *The Ramparts We Watch*, dealing with home defence, concluded with episodes from the Nazi *schrek-film*, *Feldzug im Polen*, confiscated by the British censor in Bermuda and turned over to the March of Time over the protests of the local Nazi consul who threatened to sue, etc. Of course nothing came of this threat and the scenes were shown, not with the heroic commentary on the original German sound track but with the calm, dispassionate utterances of a democracy which despised the *canaille* who could bluster over such things.

Clearly, there is no question as to what the American temper is at the moment. It becomes more pro-British every day and I have not once, yet, been able to hear the off-screen narrator's voice on a news reel shot of Winston Churchill, the King or the Queen, for the deafening applause that has broken out spontaneously from the audience.

Korda has completed *That Hamilton Woman*, which will extol the exploits of Lord Nelson and show how once before the British Isles were beleaguered by a conqueror, Napoleon, and how the might of the British Navy and the moat of the English Channel were too much even for him. The film is bound to be a tremendous success in America. Laurence Olivier will play Lord Nelson.

It has occurred to me that a timely film to revive these days is Nicholas Farkas' splendid and taut, *The Battle*, from an episode in a novel by Claude Farrère. Both an English and French version were made, with Charles Boyer in both. The enemy is un-named throughout the film, and, although the "hero" is Japan (the film was made quite a few years ago), it shows Japan as possessing an inferior navy. "We have the same ships (as the British)", says Commander Yorisaka Sadao, "but we have not the same men." Later—to a British naval attaché, serving as a neutral observer during a battle with the enemy, "Tell me," the Japanese naval officer says, "Would your Lord Nelson have done what I did?" The British officer smiles and answers, "You take the British navy very seriously, don't you?" The Jap freezes and speaks slowly. "The British navy is very serious—and very silent." "What is it, then, that you want?" asks the British officer. The son of the Rising Sun smiles blandly, "The secret that enables the British navy to win battles." When the Japanese admiral tells Yorisaka, to encourage him, "Our men can perform miracles —", he answers them cynically with, "Possibly, but a naval staff should not rely on miracles." His failure to wrest the secret of his mistakes in combat with the enemy, from the report sent by the British naval attaché to his admiralty, causes him to commit *hara-kiri*. The picture, of course, has been banned in Japan, but I am certain that the British Admiralty would be interested in seeing it.

For the rest, a few of those who constituted the flower of the French film industry succeeded in getting over here—Rene Clair, Julien Duvivier and Jean Renoir are all currently in Hollywood. Erich von Stroheim is in New York, planning an independently financed film of his story, *Bomb-Shelter*, which deals with a kaleidoscopic pattern of humanity in an air-raid shelter before, during, and after a raid. A dinner in his honour was given recently, attended by Thomas Mann, out of which emerged conversations with regard to the possible filming of Dr. Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. 1941 could not be better served, on at least the screen front, than that it should see the long overdue rehabilitation of the incomparable directorial genius of von Stroheim.

Aside from the delightful *Fantasia* of Walt Disney, the gayest new American film of the season is *The Lady Eve*, written and directed by Preston Sturges, who has become our home-grown Lubitsch, bless him. Even the frothy Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Hitchcock's latest, pales by comparison, and Lubitsch, himself, will have to go some, in his forthcoming *That Certain Feeling* (a remake of his diabolically clever *Kiss Me Again*) to surpass his newest pupil. Sturges shows an irony of attack in this film that is a positive joy.

THE EXHIBITOR'S PART

W. R. FULLER, General Secretary of the
C.E.A. explains how the war has affected
the theatres

THE DISAPPEARANCE of the chief recreation of about 13,000,000 people a day, the loss to the Exchequer of some £200,000 a week, and the danger of unemployment for about 75,000 men and women, were the first and immediate prospects arising from the official dictum in September, 1939, on the declaration of War, that cinemas were to shut up shop forthwith.

No one, whether at the top or not, knew what was going to happen; restrictions were imposed and precautions taken which now appear to have amounted almost to panic legislation. All sources of relaxation were closed By Order and the average man—and especially the woman and child—was left with nothing to do but twiddle the wireless knob or their thumbs.

Either occupation proved equally depressing, with the odds in favour of the B.B.C. being the more doleful.

But strong representations by the C.E.A. to the Home Office obtained the opening of some of the cinemas for some of the time, though in many places this only aggravated the public. They could not see why in an "evacuated" area on one side of the street one cinema should still be closed while down the road on the other side in a "reception" area another was open. One poor exhibitor rang the Office and asked for advice. He said a mob was outside calling him all kinds of rat for not opening, so what was he to do? When it was suggested that if the mob was really a big one he had better 'phone the police he replied wearily "Police? You don't know the people round here; the police do. *They* won't come."

It was at once evident that this partial and half-hearted concession to the public need was not enough. With no other recreational relief except walking the streets or standing in bars, industrial efficiency showed all the signs of taking a nose-dive, and very soon the authorities saw eye to eye with the C.E.A., supported as the Association was by now by the biggest industrialists all over the country, who had been experiencing the bad effects on the workers of "no play".

So the public's principal source of relaxation was allowed to revert to something like normal hours.

But no sooner had the exhibitor shaken off his first effect of the war than he was faced with another, in its way almost as serious: a shortage of carbons. In times of

peace the exhibitor absorbs practically the whole of the carbon supplies of the country, and with the Army coming into the market exhibitors found themselves faced with the prospect of a famine.

Once more swift action by the C.E.A. solved the difficulty. By forming with the manufacturers a Carbon Pool and rationing supplies, a situation which at one time looked desperate is now being handled with complete satisfaction to everyone and every exhibitor is getting his share of this essential commodity.

A decrease in the number of films available is a very present and most serious effect of the war for the exhibitor. Together with attempts to increase film hire prices, this has created a position which is increasing in gravity. The matter of higher prices the Association has been able to deal with when, in a case like that of *Gone With the Wind*, an attempt was made to force the maximum of 50 per cent up to 70 per cent.

An energetic and forceful campaign by the C.E.A. not only prevented other film renters from trying it on but induced Chaplin to issue orders that no more than 50 per cent was to be asked in this country for *The Great Dictator*. The recent statement in an evening newspaper that Chaplin did this in consideration of cinemas not raising their prices and that exhibitors would have gladly paid 70 per cent for the film is completely untrue. Exhibitors, through their Association, refused to pay 70 per cent for that or any film and will continue this organised refusal.

For reasonably fair possibilities of competitive booking the exhibitors need between 550 and 600 foreign (which in practice means American) films and at least 100 good British films. But during the first year of the war the exhibitors had, in round figures, only 400 foreign and a bare 100 British films all told from which to make their bookings. Present registrations show that even this number is decreasing during the current year. Obviously a drop of from 20 to 25 per cent below the reasonable-competitive-minimum is a very serious matter for all exhibitors, and unfortunately the Government seems very shy of a Film Bank, which is the obvious solution so far as British films are concerned.

These, then, have been the general effects of the war on exhibitors, and to these must be added the increased cost of everything he uses in his business, wage increases and war bonuses, and a rise in Entertainments Tax, not to mention the Sunday Opening anomaly which has just been made worse by Mr. Morrison.

What can be called "local" effects have naturally varied in different areas. These mainly affected by regulations have been the coast situations, especially the south, south-east and east, where many exhibitors have been practically ruined. In those places more prone to "blitzes" exhibitors have also suffered very badly, apart from the destruction of their property which has occurred in a number of towns.

Partial restriction of hours, brought about in some cases by the action of local authorities and everywhere by the blackout and restricted transport facilities, has further hit exhibitors, but these effects they suffer in common with the rest of the community.

But there are other effects which the war has had on the exhibitor alone. No other tradesman has been picked on for the onslaughts of everybody and everybody running something for which contributions are sought in money or kind. Apparently the first thing anyone with a collecting

scheme thinks of is the cinema, and where it has not been a request for raising or collecting money or goods it has been for the use of the screen for appeals.

Voluntarily the exhibitors have given five minutes a performance to the showing of Ministry of Information films, and the total value of this expressed in money would be enormous if the screen time had to be bought like newspaper advertising space.

The organisation of this gigantic contribution to the nation's war morale was done through the C.E.A., and provides a circulation for this propaganda, unobtainable through any other medium, to about 20,000,000 people a week. The cost of this, if it were not offered voluntarily by exhibitors, has been knowledgeably calculated at over a million and a half a year, which may be regarded as a further oblique contribution to the Exchequer by the exhibitor.

Requests for "something for nothing" do not stop at charitable appeals. They have included suggestions—to put it no stronger in some cases—for the free admission of members of the Forces, a demand made on no other class of trader, and one that again demonstrates the lamentable failure of so many people to realise that the exhibitor is actually a retail shopkeeper no less than a tobacconist or a restaurateur. But no one ever suggests that these traders should supply the Forces with free smokes or free meals. No do I know of any newspaper which has supported the idea of free admission giving the troops free morning newspapers.

Nevertheless, exhibitors have set aside seats at the lowest price for the use of the Forces, and have thus made yet another contribution to the country's Victory effort.

And the average exhibitor, who provides trained A.R.P. workers, first aid staff, fire watchers, revenue to the Exchequer, distribution of official information, employment for many thousands and cheap recreation in luxurious surroundings to millions, and does not always get a bare living out of doing all these things, goes cheerfully on his way, conscious that he is in the most essential sense "doing his bit".

The Editor, Sight and Sound

DEAR SIR,

I recently came across the summer 1940 number of your publication, and noted that page 34 records a letter, appearing under the title of "Documentary Communists" in which I am referred to as being in the "forefront in the field of cinema" of a group engaged in opposing the activities of a documentary film movement in America alleged to be under the control of Communists. Permit me to say that: (1) I am not in the forefront of any film group; (2) I am too busy to be interested in the pros and cons of Communism; and (3) that the use of my name in the letter you published was unauthorised. Whoever the writer of it may have been, he certainly never consulted me. I also observe that this letter, written under the Hollywood date of May, 1940, is signed "Experimental Cinema." I don't see how I could possibly be in touch with "Experimental Cinema" inasmuch as this publication suspended some time in 1933 or 1934. The signature, therefore, to say the least, seems rather dubious to me.

Sincerely,

G. W. BILLY BITZER.

109 West 60th Street, New York City.

Why not a School of British Film Making?

asks Film Reviewer Evelyn Russell

IN FOUR MONTHS I have reviewed fifty-one films and only nine of them were English! The rest have come from America and we have spent good money to get them. Forty-two films of which three only are outstanding—*Hudson's Bay*, *The Mark of Zorro* and *North West Mounted Police*. Even these lack the touch that would warrant the description "brilliant". There was also *Flight Command*, but in this film the photography (by permission of the U.S. Navy) steals the picture, and one good tragi-comedy *Tug-Boat Annie Sails Again*. For the rest, there were a few musicals which get by only because some of the musical sequences were good (*Let's Make Music*, a re-make of *Rumba*, *You'll Find Out*, and *Hit Parade of 1941*), the films apart from those sequences being only fair. *Hullabaloo*, of course, is admittedly a one-man riot exploiting Frank Morgan, and *Little Nellie Kelly* wouldn't matter without Judy Garland; there were also about twenty other films of various types so indifferently directed that they are not worth detailing.

Poor Westerns

Then there were, of course, the Westerns in which we expect America to excel. But take a look at the latest bunch of them—*Ride Tenderfoot*, *Ride*, with the famous Gene Autrey walking through his part, *Renfrew of the Mounties*, *Stolen Wealth*, *Rocky Mountain Rangers*, *The Gay Caballero*—where is the punch, the "Son-of-a-gun, he-man" thrill we wait for? Go on *The Trail of the Vigilantes* for an hour and a half and watch charming Franchot Tone do all he is directed to do—with pauses for the forced comedy thrust upon clever Mischa Auer. This film was starred as a feature in the West End. I can't imagine why.

We have also been shown for our delectation *The Five Little Peppers*. A good shaking would do the dear little things a power of good and give us an interval for nausea.

Loose ends in plots left dangling (*You're Out of Luck*), (*The Lone Wolf Keeps a Date*) anachronisms in period stories. (*Little Men*) careless titling which belies the plot as unfolded in the film *Ladies Must Live*, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*—all these things indicate an anything-will-do attitude in the American film-making industry that is deplorable.

A Hitchcock Failure

Mr. and Mrs. Smith was, I know, directed by Alfred Hitchcock who made *The Lady Vanishes*. The result would suggest that Mr. Hitchcock has himself vanished under the influence of Hollywood and even succeeded in turning Robert Montgomery and Carole Lombard into the ghosts of their former selves.

Why should we go on buying such films when we have men and material at hand to make better ones ourselves? The nine English films I have reviewed prove conclusively that we can do it. Take a look at them. *Quiet Wedding* and *Freedom Radio* both directed by Antony Asquith. There are no loose ends here, every artist gives a hundred per cent performance, no subtlety of glance or action is missed by the camera. *The Prime Minister* made by Thorold Dickinson—no anachronisms or faults in period detail have been allowed, unless the physical beauty of Mrs. Disraeli in the form of Diana Wynyard can be considered as such. Yet with John Gielgud's interpretation of the part of Benjamin Disraeli even the hypercritical must admit perfect balance between the two characters. Then Carol Reed, with *Kipps* to his credit, has succeeded in "putting over" the story of a simple soul *without* resorting to the frills and furbelows of "box-office glamour!" Laurence Huntington, too, has out-thrilled the Americans with *This Man is Dangerous*, and with such writers as David Hume and Have-lock Allen ("This Man is News" series) we surely need not bother too much about stories of gunmen from the other side. Leslie Fenton is not more than a pace behind with *The Saint's Vacation*, seeing that Hugh Sinclair is the Saint and Sally Gray the girl he catches up with. For comedy we can peep at *The Ghost Train*—a remake, I know, but brought up-to-date under the most able direction of Walter Forde, who has succeeded in making the new edition funnier and more ghostly than the original, with Arthur Askey as the high light. Marcel Varnel in control of the Crazy Gang—and who else would dare to take on such control?—gives us the comedy particular to the man in the street and has followed it up with *The Ghost of St. Michaels*, built, of course, round that incomparable artist Will Hay.

British Stars

The list of artists, all of whom are recognised as past-masters, each in their own particular line of country, is positively formidable. To mention a few. Clive Brook, Derek Farr, Margaret Lockwood, Marjorie Fielding, A. E. Matthews, Athene Seyler, Jean Cadell, Margarette Scott, Peggy Ashcroft, Frank Cellier, Michael Shepley, O. B. Clarence, Margaret Rutherford, Bernard Miles, Martita Hunt, Hay Petrie, Morland Graham, Ronald Squire, Cecil Parker, Felix Aylmer, Michael Redgrave, Arthur Riscoe, Helen Haye, Edward Rigby, James Mason, Mary Clare, Owen Nares, Fay Compton, Stephen Murray, Nicholas Hannen, Will Fyffe, Kathleen Harrison, Herbert Lomas, Raymond Huntley, Moore Marriot, Claude Hulbert, and

so on and so on. Not one of these artists could give a bad performance and not one is so indifferent to his art that he would think it sufficient to walk through a film.

Experts on the technical side are just as numerous—evidently—but less publicity is accorded them and their names are for the most part debarred from headlines. But they are here and produce the stuff.

Why, then, now that the Board of Trade is apparently willing to help to the extent of some £500,000 do we not do something to ensure that this band of excellent people remains with us? Why not, for example, a School of British Film-making incorporating all this talent under the direction of Antony Asquith, who has gone from strength to strength since he made *Underground*, some thirteen years ago.

Now is our opportunity, Can we not take it before peace breaks out and the people who could do this thing for England seek new pastures for want of nourishment here.

NEW N.F.L. POLICY

THE Loan Section of the National Film Library has been considerably reorganised. It is now exclusively devoted to reprints and to films illustrating the history of the cinema which can be used by film societies for historical programmes and by schools for film appreciation courses. Moreover, this reorganised Loan Section is no longer restricted, as before, to members of the British Film Institute but is also open to members of the general public. *Members, however, are entitled to borrow films at a reduced rate.*

In response to a widespread demand the National Film Library has also agreed on a new policy of making available short representative excerpts from their feature length films. The demand came principally from teachers and lecturers who often wished to illustrate a talk on, say, the German silent film or Russian theories of editing but neither had the time to show the whole of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* or *Battleship Potemkin*, nor wished to pay for the hire of a whole film in order to show one reel of it. It is now possible to hire from the National Film Library as independent units such excerpts as the Odessa Steps sequence from *Potemkin*, the separator sequence from *General Line*, and similar representative sequences from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *The End of St. Petersburg*, *The Ghost That Never Returns*, *Metropolis* and *New Babylon*. Others are to be added from time to time, and indeed suggestions would be welcomed.

Together with these changes the Library Committee has found it necessary to revise the Loan Section hiring fees. There are two rates of hire, an educational rate where the films are for school use and a film society rate, the term "film society" here including any organisations whose members contribute towards its upkeep. The educational rates of hire for 16 mm. film are now 2s. 6d. a reel a day, plus 9d. for each extra day for members and 4s. a reel a day plus 9d. for each extra day for non-members. The film society rates for 16 mm. film are 4s. 6d. a reel a day for members and 6s. a reel a day for non-members; for 35 mm. film the fees are 10s. a reel a day for members and 12s. 6d. for non-members. It should be added that these are the basic charges and that for certain films, particularly those composite films whose production has involved the library in considerable expenditure, there are special rates of hire which may be had on application to the Librarian at 4 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1.

What about some Psychological Research? says Mary Field

LITTLE research work has yet been done into how far commentary fixes the visual impression made by an interest or an instructional film. Two examples of this value of commentary have come to my notice recently. In one case the film *The Tough 'Un* was mentioned to an adult who had seen it in a cinema; he exclaimed immediately "I must go home and feed the dandelions." This piece of commentary by my much-maligned colleague E. V. H. Emmett accompanies the climax instructional and theatrical of the film. The quotation of this sentence suggests that the essence of the picture had been retained by the onlooker and subsequent conversation proved this.

The second case of a sentence of commentary being retained was given to me by J. V. Durden our cinébiologist. He remarked to an evacuee "You wouldn't know anything about an amoeba?" "Indeed I do," was the retort, "twenty-five go onto a pin's head." This piece of commentary in the impeccable accents of Carlton Hobbs had accompanied a purely educational film. Further discussion revealed that the child had retained an excellent visual knowledge of the life and habits of amoeba but his immediate response was a commentary quotation.

Surely some psychological research would be of the greatest value in helping us to use the right wording in the right place in instructional films. There also seems to me to be an argument for witty commentary in films intended for adult education provided of course such commentary be subservient to the picture.

STAGE AND FILM DÉCOR*

THERE IS A remarkable dearth of literature on the subject of film décor. This attractively got up and copiously illustrated volume is therefore very welcome. Possibly, however, the author would have been wiser to limit its scope, since it suffers somewhat from the attempt to combine at least three rather divergent themes—a history of European scenic technique, a manual of film décor, and a personal record of the author's theories and experiences. The first theme is developed at some length in order to emphasise that the naturalistic scenery of the Victorians was a temporary phase in the evolution of stage décor, and lay outside its main line of evolution, which is towards the intelligent use of conventions. The interesting point is made that film décor demands a degree of realism which is intrinsically unsuitable for the theatre. The chapters on the essentials of the film set are extremely interesting. They would, however, have been improved by a more lucid account of the Dunning process and some further account of the present uses of rear projection and the influence of acoustic considerations on set construction. Room could have been made for these items by the omission of the chapter on early optical toys which seems superfluous and, incidentally, does not make their relationship to each other or to the cinema very clear.

* By A. MYERSCOUGH-WALKER, A.R.I.B.A. With a foreword by Charles B. Cochran. (Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd. 1940.) 21s.

Getting Professional Results from a Substandard Equipment

by D. Bateman

Evacuation found us, a London School, moved to a North Devon village with no cinema. The school possessed a Bell Howell 16 mm. model 138 projector and a local hall was rented for film shows for the school. These soon became weekly shows, with Sunday shows for the troops, and already over 250 films have been shown.

Some twenty odd alterations have been made to the equipment as experience has shown points where improvement is possible and now we regularly give two 2½-hour shows weekly, showing even 2-hour films non-stop and with the usual professional devices such as curtains opening on the main titles, and superimposed colour effects, etc.

Built by Boys

The whole outfit has been built and is worked by boys, yet we only have one involuntary stoppage (e.g. for replacing a burnt-out main lamp) about once in every twenty shows.

Our improvements can be classified as under:

- (1) Reducing the chance of a stoppage.
- (2) Improving the sound quality.
- (3) Producing a more finished projection.

The chief alteration under item (1) was to enable the single machine to run non-stop for 2 hours. The largest reel available lasts 45 minutes. We therefore made a plywood reel with solid oak centre and metal plates with square holes in, which takes over 4,000 ft. of film. To mount this the front spool arm was removed from the projector case and mounted on a wooden bridge built across a large baseboard some 5 feet long by 18 inches wide. The projector and rear spool support are also mounted on this baseboard and fixed in true alignment.

A 4,000 ft. Take-up

To wind up film on a 4,000 ft. reel is impracticable, so 1,600 ft. rear spools are used. This means changing the rear spool during projection. This is easily accomplished by breaking a join at the end of 1,600 ft. and allowing the film to sink (through an aperture cut in the base of the projector case) into a bin below the shelf. By the time an empty spool has been put on and threaded some 20-30 feet of film have accumulated and it is only a matter of a few seconds by hand braking the rear spool to let it pick up this portion of film and take up the normal winding action. Similarly should the rear spool wind up loosely owing to a slack clutch, it can be changed at the next film join without stopping the machine.

A cure for lamp failures

The next most frequent source of stoppage is due to burnt-out main lamps. To lengthen their life we have improved the ventilation (a) by removing the lamp house top and fitting a wide metal tubular chimney which both offers less air resistance and conducts the hot air outside the projector case. Here a large plywood chimney some 8 inches square conducts the hot air to the roof of the projection booth where it flows up a chimney a foot square, in which is a high speed electric fan. The cold air entering the projector case from below through the hole in the base is cleaned as it enters the projection booth by passing through a double sheet of thin muslin soaked in car oil.

We find it necessary to rehearse portions of films and in order to avoid wasting the main lamp life a fixed resistance has been made cutting down the voltage on the lamp from 110 volts to 60 volts. This gives a dim picture at rehearsals and is short-circuited by a switch for proper projection.

Owing to the large variations of voltage in the supply, often 20 volts or so, we have installed (a) a voltmeter to record the voltage applied to the projector by the 110-volt output transformer, (b) a mains rheostat for gradual changes, (c) a 4-way quick action rotary switch for rapid change from one transformer setting to another during a show.

Finally, dust has caused jamming of the metal safety shutter. This has, therefore, been removed. Stills can nevertheless be shown without burning the film by the use of the dimming resistance referred to above.

A window fitted in the door enables the lower loop to be continually on view and should this shorten, a little jerk with the finger downwards restores it without stopping the machine.

To save life of the exciter lamp an on-off switch has been fitted so that it need not burn while records are being played.

Improving the sound quality

Mechanical noise in the auditorium was minimised by building a projection booth about 7 feet wide by 8 feet deep by 7 feet high of sound absorbing "board". This necessitates a monitor speaker for the projectionist. An ordinary moving coil speaker works admirably being connected through a condenser and transformer from the output of the last valve. The auditorium is unaffected.

Even with a speaker in the booth it is better to have sound controls operated by someone in the hall. The volume is there-

fore remotely controlled by a simple variable resistance of a few ohms, on stout 15 amp-leads. This is connected in series with the exciter lamp and so controls the volume. In case it should go wrong the projectionist can short circuit it by an on-off switch.

Remote mechanical control

To control the tone from bass to treble was not possible electrically but a simple mechanism of meccano gear wheels and rods enables a remote mechanical control to be operated from the auditorium. Likewise there is a remote potentiometric control of volume on gramophone records.

Mechanical noise has also been minimised by mounting the projector case on sheets of sorbo rubber, and by insulating the whole of the moving parts on rubber at many points, also by sealing up all apertures in the projector case except of course the lens aperture. A felt lined metal "funnel" between the lens aperture and the projection booth windows damps out mechanical noise proceeding from the former.

Mechanical vibration of both the exciter lamp and the photo-electric cell was found to give rise to background noise and was eliminated by further sorbo rubber padding.

Eliminating interference

Electrical interference producing hum was eliminated by using earth shielded cables for all gramophone, microphone and photocell circuits, and putting all plugs—socket connections, switches, volume controls, etc., in metal boxes which were earthed. All mains supply cables, etc., were in lead sheaths which were earthed. One defect in the sound was found only to occur after a film had already been shown once. This was a lack of clarity as though the sound were "out of focus". We attribute it to the heating of the film in the first passage through the projector causing it to warp and fail to fit snugly over the sound drum on its second passage through the projector. An effective cure was found by passing the film through a humidifier.

A humidifier

This consisted of a metal box 4 inches long containing a synthetic sponge material soaked in water. The film passed over guide pulleys which keep it close to but out of contact with the moistened sponge. This seems effectively to restore the lost moisture to the film.

Finished projection

The house lights (six 200-watt bulbs) are dimmed very satisfactorily by a "water" resistance consisting of a 4-inch drain pipe full of sodium sulphate solution. The upper electrode is slowly raised in the solution thereby increasing the resistance in the circuit. The bottom of the drain pipe is sealed with a zinc plate electrode, a layer of pitch, and finally 1½ inches of cement.

A system of signals, consisting of four coloured flashlamp bulbs enables the operator in the auditorium to signal to the projectionist such messages as "clean the top edge of the picture", "focus the picture", "give me more volume", etc., and the projectionist has a reply signal also. In this manner we have had remarkable results over a considerable period of time.

LIFE AND LETTERS TO-DAY

continuing

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(Under the editorship of ROBERT HERRING)

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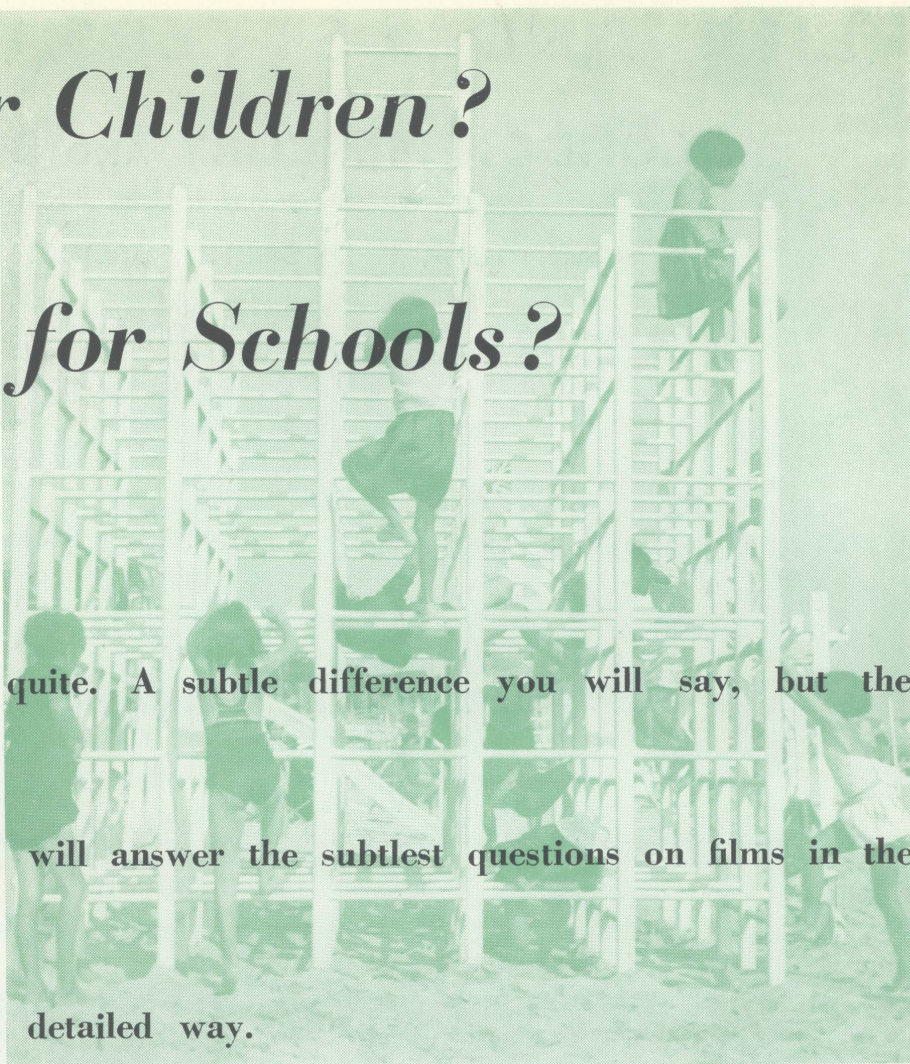
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